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Quarters

- The Cornish Cup • Page 1
A Short Story by Lucille C. Williams
- Pagan! • Page 5
A Short Story by Philip F. O'Connor
- The Bible and Myth • Page 11
An Article by John J. O'Rourke
- Obituary • Page 16
A Poem by Riley Hughes
- Esther and the Wise Man • Page 17
A Short Story by Henry Roth
- Acceptance • Page 25
A Poem by Sister Mary Honora, O.S.F.
- In Hope of a Lucid Epiphany • Page 26
A Poem by John C. Hoy
- Epiphanies • Page 27
A Poem by John Fandel
- The Accident • Page 28
A Short Story by Michael Field

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The Cornish Cup

● Lucille C. Williams

The children lived on top of a cliff, and they had a secret. Stephen and James, their names were, and Anstice was the girl. Nobody ever called them Steve or Jim or An. Although they were Americans, this was Cornwall. In the British Isles, nicknames were thought to be undignified, and even children must be granted dignity. Their father was a retired mining engineer who took an interest in the old tin mines which had been worked since Phoenician times.

The long gray stone house where they lived faced the winds, looking far out to the Western Sea. Trees spread their arms inland. Gorse and heather edged the high stone cliffs, yet a fuchsia hedge bloomed much of the year, and in the walled garden, golden apricots ripened on the espaliered trees. There was never a real hush, except inside the house. Just sometimes the wind dwindled to a little wandering breath, and sometimes it roared, accompanied by the bellow of the sea, gnawing at the rocks a hundred feet down.

In a sheltered place, back from the wall along the cliff, there was, incongruously, a folly. Dainty and frivolous, it had been placed in its small cedar grove for a young wife, homesick for the comfortable landscape of Kent, who had brought her eighteenth-century taste for elegance to this Celtic outpost long ago.

Here the children loved to play. After lessons in the morning, they

were free, and here they could indulge their taste for the fantastic.

"Ought we to worry about these games of the children, fairies and enchanters and *really* unpleasant historical characters?" Mrs. Purcell asked her husband.

"Oh, I don't know. There's nothing to play with here, and they don't seem interested in sports."

"I know. They wrote and thanked your brother politely last Christmas for the baseball and bat, but I've never seen them touch them since."

"The other day when I went out to speak to Anstice about her music lesson, she was dressed up in long robes made of old velvet curtains. When I asked what they were playing, she said quite seriously that she was Morgan le Fay."

"Surely they aren't doing Malory in school. Let me see. I'm sure we didn't do the *Morte d'Arthur* until tenth grade in my day."

"No, no. It's in the library. Of course, we could forbid them that, but I think it's good for children to have the run of a library."

"It's nothing to worry about—children always take things so seriously. The day we took the picnic to the ruins of Tintagel, I thought they were awfully quiet, and Anstice had tears in her eyes."

In the end, the Purcells did nothing. The children seemed more and more independent of them.

"Really," Mrs. Purcell remarked, "they're no trouble at all. Now the

days are drawing in, and so many of them rainy, there's none of that whining what'll-we-do-now sort of thing."

"What do they do all day? I never see them any more, except for a few minutes in the evening."

"I don't know. Just play, I expect."

They turned, as they became aware of Stephen, standing in the drawing-room door in the dusk.

"Come in, dear. Have you had tea? No, come *in*, Stephen. What's the matter with you? What's that in your hand?"

"Nothing. Just something I found."

"Let me see it."

"It's nothing. I've got to go now."

"What is the matter with you, Stephen? Come here at once."

Warily, slowly, the boy approached, and they saw that he carried a dark, cup-shaped object in his hand. He looked mutinous, but he had to hand it over for examination.

It was heavy, a two-handled goblet of some sort of tarnished metal. As they turned it about in the lamplight, they could see an intricate design and words in a strange tongue.

"Now can I have it back, please?" asked Stephen in a strained voice. "It's mine."

"How very interesting! Where did you get it?"

"I found it."

"Where?"

Silence.

"Where? Speak up, boy."

"I promised not to tell. And it's *mine*."

"That's no way to talk to your parents. Of course you shall have it back. But I'd like to find out what it is. It looks old and valuable. Leave it here and I'll consult Professor Fahnestock in Penzance tomorrow."

"You promise I'll have it back?"

"Of course I promise." Reluctantly

Stephen went up to his room.

The next day, after spending the morning buying supplies from a list given him by his wife and dropping in briefly at the farmers' stalls, as it was market day, John Purcell remembered the cup. He fetched it from his car and took it to the little museum next to the old church.

"My name's Purcell, Professor Fahnestock," he said. "I'm living at the old Polperro place on the Tintagel Road."

"How do you do," said the old man with a shy smile. "Did you come to see the exhibit of old Celtic artifacts?"

"No, but perhaps you can help me. My boys found this on the place the other day, and it arouses my curiosity." He took it out of the paper bag he had brought it in and handed it to the Professor, who took it from him eagerly. Then he looked up, his eyes shining.

"What a find! Where did they get it? What an extraordinary thing! It's a chalice, you know, and a very fine one. Gold, if I'm not mistaken, and with some Celtic words engraved on it."

He screwed a jeweler's loupe into his eye and turned the cup in hands that trembled. "Lovely, lovely," he murmured. "Let me see what it says. Will you excuse me, sir, for a few minutes? I shall have to consult my books." He fairly ran into his little office, where he pulled several books off the shelves and sat down at his desk.

Purcell was amused, but he was impressed too. Maybe the boys had really come upon something. How exciting, if they had!

Fahnestock drew a pad toward him and scribbled on it, scratching out and writing, obviously translating. "Come

in, sir. I must apologize for running away like that. The truth is it's very interesting, very interesting indeed. It's a chalice, all right, the kind used for the Eucharist. But I can't understand it; what it says on it is most unusual, unsuitable."

"Well, what does it say?"

"Odd. Of course, I could be wrong. I'd have to consult someone more expert than I. But it seems to say 'Cursed be he who drinks from me.' There's a dim sort of crest too. Maybe the College of Heralds could decipher it and identify it for us."

"How old do you think it is?"

"Celtic, of course; maybe sixth century. We'll have to study it. They're going to be very excited about this find, I can assure you. Wasn't there anything else found with it? These things aren't usually found alone. They were hidden, you know, with other treasures, from Sax-on marauders."

"The boys didn't mention anything else. Of course, we didn't know then that it was this important. I'll ask them as soon as I get back. They'll be awfully proud of it. We'll have to find a good place to keep it. They've been so interested in the *Morte d'Arthur* lately too."

"My dear sir—surely you realize—they can't possibly keep it, you know."

"Why not? What do you mean? They found it!"

The old man looked distressed. "Oh dear, I am sorry, Mr. Purcell, but it's treasure trove, like the chalice of Trewbiddle."

"It's a treasure all right, but what has that to do with it?"

"Treasure trove belongs to the Crown, by law."

"Are you *sure*?"

"Yes, I'm sure. If it's declared

treasure trove, it's the Crown's. In the meantime, you can entrust it to me for study, and if it isn't gold—then, maybe. Anyway, why don't you see your solicitor?"

"You bet I will! I never heard of such a thing. It doesn't seem fair."

Calming himself with an effort, he said, "I don't mean to be unpleasant, but it is a surprise to a foreigner. I took it for granted that 'finders keepers' was the rule. I'll be back in a day or two. Thank you very much." He went out, leaving the curator holding the cup and looking unhappy.

As he drove into the cobbled stable yard in the dusk, Stephen and James were waiting for him. He could see Anstice too, her small face glimmering at a window upstairs.

"You're late, Daddy! Can we have our cup now, please?"

"Not just yet, boys. I'm sorry, I had to leave it in Penzance for a few days. They want to study it at the museum. But don't let's talk out here. I'm tired and cold. Come into the house."

The two children confronted him by the fire in the hall.

"You promised," said Stephen.

"What did you let them have it for?" said James to his brother passionately.

"How could I help it! They're grown-ups, aren't they? And they promised."

"I'm sorry, boys. Let me tell you about it. Hello, Beth, you're just in time to hear what Fahnestock said about the cup."

As he told the story, the boys stood rigid and wooden.

"There, now! Isn't that exciting?" Their mother looked at them apprehensively.

"How soon did he say we could have it back?"

"Well, he wasn't sure. I'm to go back in a day or two." He paused. "I hate to tell you, too, but the truth is, if it's gold, I'm afraid it belongs to the Queen."

"To the *Queen!* But *we* found it! James and I and Anstice, *we* found it. Why should the Queen have it? It's ours. You promised!"

Purcell looked at them helplessly. How to explain it. And in truth, he sympathized.

"What did you have to go and show it to him for? It's ours." They were trembling with frustration, looking desperately from one silent parent to the other. Then they turned and ran out of the room, the sound of their feet echoing in the distance down the old flagged passages.

Perplexed, the parents ate a silent dinner. "I don't know what else I could have done, Beth. Let's hope it's not gold."

The children had had their breakfast and gone out early, the cook told them in the morning. There was no sign of them. With a sigh, Purcell said, "I'd better go into Penzance, I suppose, and see the lawyer who arranged about the house. He's the only one I know here."

As he went to get his coat, they heard a car drive up to the door. Purcell opened it, to see Professor Fahnstock, hand raised to the bell-pull.

"I had to come out at once and see you, my dear fellow. It's very exciting."

"Come in, Professor, and tell us about it. The children are very much upset; they're afraid they're going to lose their cup."

"Do you think I could see them? I'm very anxious to find out whether there were other objects in the hiding place. This chalice, you know, it's unique. It may have a place in the Arthurian legend."

There was a sound of running feet and sobbing breath. Anstice, pale of face, almost speechless with fright, was in the doorway.

"Daddy! Mother! Oh, come right away. Stephen and James, they're fighting." She looked at them wildly, then ran, and they ran after her.

"Where are they? Where are they? Wait!"

"Oh, hurry, hurry." Out the garden door, across the grass, into the folly she ran.

A square hole; steps going down; the sound of sobs, and a boy's voice, "Thou—hast slain me, sith I shall die this death."

They looked down, horrified. James stood there, white as paper, his eyes sick, in his hand a short bronze sword. Stephen lay at his feet, his breath whistling, blood spreading over the ancient stones.

Bewildered, they ran down the steps, to kneel beside him. Stephen said, "And now, forgive it thee God, for it—shall ever be said that the one—sworn brother—hath slain the other."

In the silence the bronze sword clanged on the stone floor; there was a rush of feet. In a moment James was gone, a despairing cry all that was left at the top of the cliff.

"I was afraid, when they drank from it. They were always quarreling after." Anstice looked down at the little pile of metal things, made long ago by skillful hands. "You can have it all now."

Pagan!

● Philip F. O'Connor

Godless mobs of delinquents roamed the beach on Sundays. That's what his mother said. Still Martin turned left, instead of right at the street corner, out of sight of the living-room window from behind which she watched. He felt tight. It was his heavily starched shirt and tweed suit. The suit was too small for him now.

Last First Friday he had fainted during Mass at the parish church. He awoke in the hospital emergency room and saw his mother crying. She had rushed there from the neighborhood bakery where she worked. Two doctors were speaking to her. He saw her stamp her foot and say, "No." Then that doctor came to Martin and said he was a psychiatrist. "Come upstairs with me," he said, "and tell me what happened."

Upstairs Martin said, "It was Communion time and I was saying my prayers getting ready when the whole church went white like lightning came into it, and I thought that's what it was until Christ started wiggling on the cross to get off. I thought He was climbing down to get me. I shouted at Him not to hurt me. But He didn't hear me. I remember shouting. Then I forget."

The psychiatrist looked at him for a long time. He did not seem angry, but why wouldn't he say something?

"You don't believe me, I bet. Once I saw St. Joseph move his arm and smile down at me. I was seven or eight. I was at the Communion rail.

He was holding this lily with a big long stem. He pushed it toward me and smiled like he was telling me I had nothing to worry about. That's the only other time. It happened, though. I'm sure. Do you believe me?"

The psychiatrist seemed to be trying to hypnotize him. Staring. Smiling. But not angry.

"My mother doesn't believe in psychiatrists. She has told me about them. They are pagan. Why do you work at a Catholic hospital?"

"I am a Catholic."

Martin sat for a long time thinking about that. It did not make sense. He began to get angry. He did not know why.

Finally the doctor said, "Why do you think you fainted?"

"Maybe I didn't faint," the boy said. "Maybe the Holy Ghost came into the church."

"Do you believe that?"

"My mother doesn't like psychiatrists."

"Do you believe the Holy Ghost came?"

"My mother is nearly a saint. She goes to Mass and Holy Communion every morning before she goes to work, and benediction every Friday night. Sometimes on Sundays she goes to three Masses before I even wake up. She visits the sick about once a week and goes all the time to pray for dead people at funeral parlors, even though she doesn't know who it is."

"How old are you?"

"Eleven. You don't believe anything I say."

The doctor nodded.

"Everything?"

"I believe you are telling the truth."

"Can you read my mind?"

"No."

"Why are you a Catholic and a psychiatrist?"

He did not answer.

The boy turned his thoughts to himself now. He wondered why he was asking the questions he was asking. He was beginning to like the psychiatrist. "I think I better go," he said. "My mother is waiting."

The psychiatrist did not say, "Stay." Both of his hands rested on the top of his desk. He looked at one of them.

It would be better if the psychiatrist were angry. "My mother makes me go to Mass and Communion every Sunday. If you have faith, you don't need psychiatrists. That's what she says." She had not said it, but she might have said it.

"Do you like going to church?"

Martin hesitated. He nearly said that he didn't. That he had been missing Mass lately on Sundays. But he didn't say that. What he said was "I don't really mind except for wearing my best shirt and pants. They're tight. My mother can't afford new clothes now, but someday she will be able to. You have to wear your best things to God's house. That's what she says. She made me wear my white shirt and tie and Sunday suit to school today."

"Made?"

"She wanted me to."

"You said *made*."

"I didn't mean that. She never forces me to do anything."

"You said *made*."

"It would hurt her feelings if I didn't."

The psychiatrist waited, studying him.

The boy felt very uneasy now. "I'm leaving."

The doctor made no move to stop him.

He stood. "I'm going to tell my mother what you said." He expected the psychiatrist to protest. When he didn't, Martin said, "What happened in church is none of your business, you know."

The doctor did not seem to hear him. He said, "I think you should come back and see me about once a week for a while."

"No," said Martin, "and I'm going to tell my mother *that* too."

The psychiatrist stood and led the boy to the door. "I will tell her," he said.

He noticed the same boy every Sunday. He had a dark skin and a deep jaw and wild and shiny wavy hair. He always seemed to be at the center of the group. The others Martin did not remember Sunday to Sunday, but this boy he remembered. He was tall and barefoot and wore slim faded white pants and no shirt and seemed to be speaking constantly. To the sky and to the sea. The others listened. Sometimes he would break from the group and run and plunge into the sea and the others would laugh. He nearly told his mother about the wild boy one Sunday but didn't when he realized that telling her would let her know he hadn't been to church.

"You must always attend Mass, no matter how bad things get," she said. "I won't be around to look after you all the days of your life, and that's why it's good I put you on your own

now and let you go to late Mass by yourself."

"What would happen if I didn't go?"

"What makes you say such a thing?" Her eyebrows fell into a frown. "Don't ask such questions."

"I mean if I weren't me, but someone who didn't like to go to church."

"God has his own ways of punishing. It's not for you to ask."

"Did you ever miss Mass?"

"Never," she said firmly. "Never deliberately."

"I wonder what would happen. Pagans don't go to church."

"Pagans pay for it. Pagans aren't happy."

"Some of them must be."

"Some of them must be?" she repeated. "Name one. Name a pagan who's happy."

"I only know Catholics," he said.

"A good thing. At least you have someone to turn to. Who has a pagan to turn to when he's down? No one but himself. And that's the one person he needs to get away from."

"Maybe a friend. Maybe he could turn to a friend."

"Gaah. Friends don't have the answer. Only one person has the answer. That's God."

"I wish God would come down to earth once in a while so we could ask him questions."

"You're denying your Faith when you say a thing like that. Denying your Faith. What kind of Faith is it that has to have God come down every five minutes and reinforce it?"

"Just once in a while. If he would maybe appear in the sky once in a while."

"And wouldn't that make things awfully easy for us?" she said sarcastically.

"Did you ever wonder if He wasn't

in the Holy Communion wafer?"

"Martin!"

"I'm sorry."

"What's coming over you?"

He didn't know. He lay in bed for a long time that night wondering about it, but still he didn't know. Tomorrow was First Friday. If you attended Mass and received Holy Communion for nine consecutive First Fridays, you could not die in mortal sin and be condemned to Hell. That's what his mother had said. Tomorrow would be his ninth. If he made it to Holy Communion he would never have to worry about dying with the sin of missing Sunday Mass on his soul. A priest would find him first. He would confess.

"Did you get to Communion?"

"No," he said removing his tie from his pants pocket. Someone had taken it off and put it there after he had fainted.

"God help us. What does all this mean? You were minutes away from insuring your salvation and then you fainted. It makes me wonder if you wanted to faint."

"I didn't," he protested. "It just came over me." He put his tie on the kitchen table.

"We'll have to pray extra hard tonight. Maybe it's not meant that you should make the nine First Fridays."

"Why would it not be meant?"

"How do I know?" she said. She removed a loaf of bread from the paper bag full of rolls and bread she had taken from the bakery where they had stopped on the way home from the hospital. She had told the bakery owner that she would not be able to work for the rest of the day. Her son had gotten sick at school she said. She handed Martin two slices. "Put these in the toaster," she said. "I

made them fresh yesterday. A little toast will do you good."

"I'm not hungry."

"Do what I say." She seemed irritated.

"What could it mean?" he said

"What could what mean?"

"God not wanting me to make the nine First Fridays."

"I told you I don't know. Stop talking about it."

She poured herself a cup of tea and took it to the kitchen window where she peered out at the rolling gray mass of fog that was sweeping in over the house. "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph—"

"Mother."

"—give us succor in this time of great peril."

It was the voice he often heard when he used to go with her to seven o'clock Mass. A strange droning voice. Deep, distant, and soft. Not meant for his ears. It had always frightened him. As though while she was lost in her prayers, something might happen to him and she would not know it. He was frightened now. He spoke to her again, but she did not hear. She never heard him when she was praying.

"—and if it be your will not to give the boy a chance to insure his salvation, at least then to give me a sign as to why you are doing this. Let me know what has gone wrong. Is it something he has done? Or thought? Dear Mary and Joseph. Patrons of families. Intercede with your Divine Son for me so that I may know—"

He felt suddenly envious of the invisible young boy Jesus to whom her prayers were directed. He had felt envious at other times. But now it was worse. He nearly burst out and shouted, "I hate him! I hate him!"

He did not shout. He was afraid.

"Eat the toast," she said after she had finished praying.

He tried, but he couldn't get it down.

Once the dark boy picked up a smaller boy and ran with him to the surf. The boy who was being carried did not cry out. In fact he was laughing with the others in the group who were watching. Martin wondered why the small boy was not afraid. The dark boy held him high, then hurled him into a rising breaker. The small boy was still laughing when he stood and struggled to get back to the beach.

"I know," she said one day after they had finished saying the evening rosary together. "I know now why God prevented you from making your First Friday. It came to me while we were praying." Her tone was solemn but sympathetic.

"Why?" he said eagerly.

"It's the questions you've been asking. About Him. I suspected as much, but I wasn't sure until now. In not letting you take Holy Communion, He gave you a sign." Her eyes met his. "You must stop questioning. You will not be allowed to insure your salvation until you stop questioning."

Martin was relieved. He was afraid God had told her he had been missing Mass on Sundays. That night before falling asleep, he promised himself that he would stop asking questions. It would not be hard to stop asking questions. Not as hard as it would have been had he had to stop going to the beach.

Each Sunday, Martin crept closer. One Sunday he had sat on a piece of driftwood waiting for the group to pass near him. He was going to say

hello. He was going to look the dark boy right in the eye and say hello. But the group was late that Sunday, and he didn't get the chance. Just after they appeared—specks on the distant beach—he turned and looked up the hill to the Church. The congregation had begun to pour out onto the street. It was time for him to go home.

"What did the priest have to say in his sermon this morning?"

"I wasn't listening very closely," he said.

"You haven't listened very closely for a long time. What's the matter with you?"

He punctured the soft orange belly of the egg before him. "Nothing," he said.

"At least you're not asking questions anymore. That's a good sign anyway."

He felt malicious. He did not know why. "What did the doctor tell you?" he said.

"What doctor?"

"The psychiatrist."

"Don't talk about that man." She stamped her foot on the kitchen floor. "What is someone like that doing at a Catholic hospital anyway? I'm going to write a letter to Sister Imelda one of these days." Sister Imelda was the administrator at the hospital. "If that doesn't work, I'm going to write to the Archbishop."

"He said he was a Catholic."

"I don't care what he said he was. The Catholic Church is flirting with too many pagan ideas lately. I remember when that—that—that man was appointed. There was a lot of opposition from the older members of the clergy."

"He was nice to me."

"Martin!"

"He was, and I don't think he

wants you to force me to go to church."

She put her hands over her eyes.

"I'm sorry," he said.

She did not answer.

"Mother?"

"How am I going to bear up under this trial?"

"Mother?"

"Our Father, who art in Heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done. On earth, as it is in Heaven—"

"Mother?"

"Pray with me. Give us this day—"

"Stop!"

"Pray."

He did. "—Give us this day our daily bread and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation. But deliver us from evil. Amen."

"Go to your room now," she said.

He went to his room. He tried to pray. He knew that that was what she wanted him to do. But he could not pray.

It was a beautiful day. Very bright and not too hot. He slipped on his swimming trunks before putting on his suit pants. He went to the kitchen to kiss her goodbye.

"You pay attention today now. Hear?"

He did not reply.

On the way to the beach he thought of the psychiatrist. He wished the psychiatrist were with him. Maybe the psychiatrist would be out walking and would see him.

When he reached the dunes, he scanned the beach until he located the specks. He rushed stumbling across the dunes tearing his tie from his throat and his shirt from his back. At the piece of driftwood, he undid

his pants and let them fall to the sand.

They were close enough to notice him. He waved. Someone pointed to him. A girl. The dark boy stopped. That meant everyone stopped. There were about a dozen of them in all. They were wearing loose fluttering shirts and blouses. And shorts. And swimming trunks. The dark boy was wearing his same slim faded white pants. His skin seemed darker than ever today. He put his hands on his hips and looked at Martin.

"Why are you stopping?" Martin whispered.

The dark boy seemed magically to have heard him. He cocked his head. He began to walk toward Martin. The others followed.

Martin's heart swelled, pushing out against his ribs. It was hard for him to breathe. "Hurry!" His legs quaked. He held the piece of driftwood for support.

Some of the others rushed ahead of the dark boy and swarmed around Martin.

He did not notice them. His eyes were fixed on the dark boy.

The dark boy came closer and then he smiled.

Martin broke from the piece of driftwood and rushed toward him. He could see nothing but the dark boy's smiling eyes. He ran as fast as he could. At the last moment he thrust out his hands. Too late. He crashed into the dark boy's middle. "Pagan!" he shouted.

The dark boy fell back. "Hey!" Then he reached forward and plucked Martin off his feet.

"The surf!" someone yelled. And he yelled it too. "The surf!"

The dark boy raised him above his head and spun him around and

around until he began to feel dizzy. His trunks were coming loose. He held them with one hand and cried, "More!" "He wants more," someone said and the dark boy spun him faster and faster. Martin could not see. Finally the dark boy shouted, "Now!"

The icy shock made him scream. He tried to stand. He fell. Cold salt shot into his nostrils. He tasted it. He could not breathe. He leaped up but fell again. He tried to raise himself with his hands. A breaker hit him from the side. He rolled over and over. Now he could not feel bottom. Now he could. He stood on his toes finally and turned in a circle. He saw the breaker which had hit him but he could not see beyond it. On his tip toes he pushed himself toward the beach.

"There he is," someone called.

He looked. Heads appeared above the dying breaker. The dark boy's was the highest. The dark boy was laughing. "What's your name?" he called.

"Martin! Martin!" He trudged through the backwash until he reached the dark boy.

"Come with us," the dark boy said.

Martin looked at the others. They were all smiling at him. Someone slapped him on the back and said, "You did good, Martin."

Martin glanced toward the piece of driftwood. He saw his suit pants. Beyond that lay his shirt. Above that the church. People were beginning to appear on the steps. Soon there would be more of them.

Martin turned. The dark boy and his followers had started down the beach. The dark boy began to sing. He had a strange voice, deep and lonely like the wind. Martin listened. Then he too followed.

The Bible and Myth

• John J. O'Rourke

The principal work of a Catholic exegete or interpreter of Sacred Scripture is to find the literal sense of meaning of a passage or of a book contained in the Bible. This object presumes that such meaning is there to be found. It is part of his task, also, to draw the implications of the meaning which is found; he can and should strive to express the meaning (which is found) in terms more readily comprehensible to those living today. It is highly doubtful, for example, that a modern religious writer would attempt to describe God's sovereign power, even figuratively, by showing his dominion over primeval chaos. Yet the author of Genesis does just that, making use of a then current notion of the state of the world before the appearance of our earth as a vehicle for the proclamation of God's might.

Since his work is one of interpreting a portion of a particular body of literature, the exegete must employ those insights which have been gained by scholars in the general field of literary criticism and interpretation. Indeed, because the exegete is himself a literary critic, his work can contribute to the general area of literary studies. However, given the nature of the particular body of literature, the Bible, the exegete must at times proceed differently than does another literary critic.

The Catholic exegete holds that the body of literature which he treats has been given in a special, unique manner by God through human authors. In the language of Catholic theology, this is the fact of inspiration. If we were to content ourselves with only natural or naturalistic categories of classification, this aspect of the works of the Bible cannot be proved. I know that the books contained in the Bible are inspired only because I accept this fact on the authority of God, who has revealed it and has had it proclaimed in and through the Church. The exegete must keep the aspect of the inspiration of the books of the Bible in mind while he works. At times it influences him positively, leading him to discover meaning which would otherwise be unattainable; sometimes this aspect influences him negatively, forbidding him to entertain as possible some meaning which would appear likely from a literary or linguistic standpoint. It is unlikely that we could be sure of the religious character of the Canticle of Canticles if it had not been revealed that the work was inspired.

The Catholic exegete is also a Catholic; he believes, therefore, that the definitive teaching of the magisterium of the Church is infallible. Since, for example, the Councils of Chalcedon and Constantinople II defined that Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary, he knows that he cannot interpret a passage in which there is reference to the brothers of Jesus as referring to other children born of Mary, even though linguistically such an interpretation is possible. (Even from a linguistic standpoint, however, the Catholic interpre-

tation is not difficult, given the spread of signification of the underlying Hebrew or Aramaic language.)

Thus the exegete does not move completely in the same sphere as does the interpreter of other literature. If nonbelievers question his "professional integrity" on this account, he realizes that they are questioning his faith, not his ability.

The past few decades have seen a renewed interest among Catholics concerning the Bible. (Sometimes it would seem that there is more interest about it than in it; it is to be hoped that there will be an increased twofold interest.) While the courses in Sacred Scripture did occupy a privileged position in the curricula of seminaries and faculties of theology, it is safe to say that formal courses on the Bible were seldom offered in colleges for lay students until after World War II. Now there is a Scripture course taught in almost all Catholic institutions of higher learning; moreover, there is a movement to make the teaching of religion directed to students of primary and secondary schools more biblical in its orientation. Furthermore, more of the Scriptures will be used in the reformed liturgy that is to be one of the results of the Second Vatican Council.

At the same time, there has arisen a greater respect for the folklore — here used in its widest sense—of ancient or preliterate peoples. Several reasons can be given for this. A complete listing of them would be beyond my powers; more than that, since each individual piece must be considered separately, the reasons for the reevaluation of folklore could only be considered in a large volume. The greater attentibility given to the story of the Maoris' arrival in Ao Te Aroa or the Hawaiians' coming to their island home is in part due to the discovery of the action of Pacific Ocean currents.

The study of folklore also shows what was the basic understanding of life possessed by a number of peoples, how they attempted to explain the world seen and unseen. Thus there has arisen renewed interest in *myth*.

The exegete cannot be unaware of these developments, especially as they regard the beliefs of the nations who neighbored upon the ancient Hebrews. Oral or written statements are not made in a cultural vacuum. Archaeology has made it abundantly clear that the people of Israel were open to the influence of their neighbors in many things. The exegete must weigh these influences as to their effect on what was written in the Old Testament and how it was said. By doing so, he can better determine what is the substance of the message of the author. It is abundantly clear that the author of Genesis was not attempting to write natural history when under the figure of the period of six days he describes God's bringing everything into existence; what the author has done is to take some then current popular notions regarding the origin of the physical universe and to use them to bring out his doctrine of creation, of God's might, goodness, and providence.

The category of myth must concern him as well. This would be true even if his only work were to defend the Bible against those who would attack it as merely a collection of stories of no particular worth except as an example of what an unenlightened people could accept. However, other factors are presently at work. The reevaluation of myth as a form of expression has come about among those who accept the old Stoic dictum that nothing human

should be considered foreign; they seem to think that we can at least contribute to our own self-understanding by understanding what these peoples thought. This approach is, at the least, closely related to the increasing existentialistic and personalist approach advocated by many. What gives me a basis for my own understanding of myself? What will enable me to find myself, to give meaning and finality to my own living? Can ancient myths be of assistance to me?

Up to now, no definition of *myth* or its cognates has been given. In point of fact it is difficult to give a definition of myth. Moreover, when a term was used for a long time—and still is used in a disparaging sense, it is rather difficult to bring about that such an overtone will not be felt when the term is used in another way. In point of fact, myth is used in our culture in both ways, that is, pejoratively and non-pejoratively; moreover, it is used often with only a very vague meaning at best, no matter what the denotation or connotation intended.

It has been said that the exegete must make use of the findings made by the scholars in the general area of literature. May we not ask if some of the supposed findings are not suppositions, and mythical ones at that, with *mythical* meaning here a commonly accepted view that is not tested and may be false? It is stated that "the style is the man," for example. With this as a basis, the whole field of stylo-statistics has been developed. Yet can the basis be proved? Is not the assumption false as a universal? Is there anyone who denies that each one of us has several styles of expression? It is most likely true that we do follow a relatively fixed pattern of language when using one of our modes of expression in a relatively narrow period of time. Yet as we grow older, do we not change and our manners of expression change also? The vocabulary of a man who has served in the armed forces is not the same afterwards as before. The college paper editor will not be the sportswriter of a later decade.

Another common myth of today is that a certain mode of expression is not consonant with an ideal manner of expression. Let us take an example from the reports of the discussions of the Second Vatican Council. One of the complaints was that the language of some of the draft schemas was too triumphal and not biblical. One critic has stated that the triumphal language used in Roman documents is far removed from the humble manner of expression found in the New Testament. I suppose that such a criticism is considered a rather ecumenical approach. However, is the language of the New Testament so humble? The Church is said to be made up of saints, those who are sanctified in Christ, who have been called into fellowship with God's Son, Jesus Christ, who form the kingdom of God, who are in the sheepfold of Jesus Christ, who are the branches of the vine which is Jesus. The faith of the Romans is said to be proclaimed throughout the world. An apostle is said to be one who is to bring about obedience to faith; a bishop is to entreat, to rebuke, and to reprove. Obviously *myth* was used at the beginning of this paragraph to signify a slogan which upon analysis is false.

Another myth about the Bible, if we take myth as signifying a false notion, is that there is a peculiar genre of classification under which all of the works contained in the Bible come, and which demands that everything

be understood literalistically as true. If such a view were correct, then Herod was both a man and a fox. Lest anyone say that obviously a literary figure was employed there, and that thus no argument is given against the principle that everything is to be taken as literalistically true, I shall give another example. Am I supposed to believe that there was a day with an evening and a morning before there was a sun in the heavens? Obviously not. Thus the schema of Genesis I is patently a literary device, one which is not to be understood literalistically.

Much more pertinent today is a discussion of myth in the Bible. Given the present use of terms—I should prefer to say misuse of terms, a misuse which is a hallmark of our supposedly enlightened and scientific age—one can defend any of the following statements and remain within the bounds of orthodoxy: the Bible is replete with myth; there is no myth in the Bible; the mythological element in the Bible is what really matters; while there may be expressions taken more or less from the mythologies of surrounding nations, there is no myth in the Bible, and hence an interpreter should not speak of the mythical when attempting to illuminate the sacred text. All that is necessary for the defense of any of the statements is a proper definition of myth, one in each case which is presently used. Obviously no single definition can be used in all cases. (If the proverbial sophomore—is this another myth, here an abstraction without a factual basis?—should remember the first of the four statements, I do trust that he will also remember the context in which it was made and cite it if he uses the statement.)

I suggest that one is creating a new myth, understood now as a flight from reality into the world of fantasy, if he speaks of myth in the Bible with the hope of making the Christian message more pertinent to men and women of today. It seems that often the recourse to the category of myth, undefined of course, is made to escape the confrontation with the factual. Perhaps some consider it a gain if a person will accept a demythologized Christianity when he or she cannot accept a Christianity which proclaims some things as having actually occurred and others as still to come. The problem is not new. If we take demythologization as meaning the explaining away of a difficulty, we find that the process was already at work in the sixth decade of the first century at Corinth, where some men called into doubt the possibility of the future corporeal resurrection. Against this attempt, Saint Paul reacted with vehemence. What seemed as foolishness to the Greek—the term is Paul's—was to be believed. In like manner he proclaimed the salvific effect of the death of Jesus upon the Cross, though to many Jews the idea of salvation coming through a crucified man was a stumbling block. Whether the Greek or the Jew thought these things as possible, comprehensible, or relevant did not prevent a Paul, a John, or a Peter from proclaiming them. The death and the physical resurrection of Christ were for them real events, facts; so, too, were the effects of these actions of Christ.

It is the work of the exegete to determine the purport of a biblical statement. When he determines that the meaning of a particular passage is that such and such occurred here on earth or that such and such occurs in the person who believes in and has love for Jesus, he should not abandon the

use of terms like *fact*, *factual*. Obviously the salvific results of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus cannot be made known by the use of the criteria of critical history, any more than they can be made known by philosophical reasoning. That does not make them any less factual, any less real. To me it seems improper to call the salvific effects of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus myth, even if one does not intend to deny by the use of that term that the effects really take place. The term *myth* should be avoided because to many it implies a lack of reality, of factuality. Willy-nilly by using this term, one tends to justify the belief that the only things that matter are those which are subject to verification by sense experience or by the methods of the physical sciences. The dangerous outlook which one is trying to overcome is thus strengthened.

It is an easy step for one to proclaim that Christian belief is a good thing for those who find comfort in it, who can orient their lives about it. Indeed, there may be some who think that all should have their myths, the projections into the respective consciousness of needs and desires, in order that some meaning may be found for what is otherwise a senseless existence, a non-authentic existence; they might say that if Christianity, if Catholicism, can give this meaning to certain lives, then those people should accept it. This is the creation of a new myth, i.e., a basic misunderstanding of what the biblical proclamation says that it is, a proclamation which admits that it does not correspond in all things to the expectations of all men, but which declares that men and women must accept it if they are to have eternal life.

We can admit, we do admit, we must admit that the teaching of Jesus given at times in concrete circumstances has also application by reason of some similarity of situation in our own lives. This was already seen by the evangelists who produced the four Gospels. It was not just antiquarian interest that led Saint Matthew to give Our Lord's teaching about the proper attitude to be had by one who was to sacrifice in the Temple in Jerusalem; the same spirit of fraternal charity taught by Jesus to his disciples should be found among all Christians. However, each Gospel is more than a collection of timeless moral truths, couched at times in parables and at other times in statements conditioned by concrete social circumstances. The moral teaching is there; so is the factual. Neither is preserved in its essentials by relegating to an undefined category of myth what some find difficult. Christian morality is not defended either by bearing witness to an ideal without, however, stating what is categorically prohibited or commanded. This statement is an example of a myth of a different kind, an incomplete statement regarded as complete; but enough of that.

It is true that an over-literalism marked much of exegesis for a long time; however, it would be an even greater fault to sacrifice that literalism which is demanded for the preservation of what was and is the Christian proclamation. There is no fear that the Catholic exegete will do this. What can be feared is that the terminology which he employs will be open to equivocal understanding on the part of others or will be used by others who have not the same desire to proclaim the truth as it is. Much can be said for the way in which the *devanciers* of the exegetes of today tenaciously clung to terms like *real*, *fact*, *historical*, which terms they at-

tempted to define. We can do so in like manner. I think that we should expect that others interested in presenting Christ and his teaching to other men will do so also. While it is obvious that any proclamation in order to be a proclamation must be understood by those who hear it, the same proclamation cannot be said to be meaningless simply because they who hear it refuse to admit the possibility that it could be correct. A change in terminology should be made only when the terms used have taken on such a different meaning that they no longer serve as a vehicle of communication. Certainly the use of a term like *myth*, which now can be said to have little cognitive value in itself, is not to be recommended in presenting anything as important as the biblical proclamation of Christ.

Obituary

● Riley Hughes

Charles, to a foe
 fallen—
 noted between toast and coffee
 and flip of the morning paper:
 the two-column head
 and the photograph, taken in
 moment of laughter, or per-
 haps immortal longing,
 eyes fixed on the middle distance—
 lends glancing thought.

The reptile's flick of hatred
 is for Charles himself.
 The plump, freckled hand flung
 outward, down, dismissing,
 the argument of averted head,
 were his then?

Eyes with ellipsis in them
 belonged to another.

Esther and the Wise Man

• Henry Roth

A fierce pain swam along the inside of her stomach and then it ricocheted upwards piercing her chest, various spots reacting cruelly to the continuing probing hurt. Esther sobbed quietly in order not to rouse a nurse's ministrations; she continued to sob throughout the evening; the stifled cries and almost rhythmic moaning fused into a lament—and then she fell into thick, uncomfortable sleep.

When she awoke, she lifted her left hand—it was impossible to move any part of her right side, so much had been torn away—*so much*. Like decay from a rotting tooth, scooped up by a surgeon's thrust and tossed into a pail of human debris.

The operation itself assailed her waking time. She did not understand in any sort of precise detail what had occurred. This layman ignorance was compounded by the fact that the doctors and nurses lied; and all were so young, so that nothing had been done right, nothing they told her was true. She had been set upon by a horde of smiling faces and rotten hands, and her body trembled at the outrage committed upon it.

Butchers, butchers' assistants sniping carelessly—may God help her. Esther knew with great certainty she would die in this bed—in this terrible white hollow room—no matter how they attempted to deceive her with smiles or encouraging limp pats. One day soon she would be granted a

wonderful slumber of no awakening. This knowledge sustained her through an ordeal of pain and disbelief; she was placid and quite docile; with the daily examination she became a shy flirt with the many doctors who knew her body better than she. Esther held her husband's hand firmly, and mechanically completed the loose ends of his embarrassed small talk.

Nurse Randall was the one Esther hated the worst, since they were in contact with each other in the morning and early afternoon. It was not surprising, almost fitting that it would be Nurse Randall who would shatter the flimsy shield that Esther had so laboriously constructed. Randall was followed by the doctor who examined her that day; even the surgeon came in officially to confirm the news, and before a lengthy drowsiness finally permitted her some sort of feeble escape, a young, bright-cheeked night nurse repeated the words. Though the speech was the same, the initial shock and fear persisted. All day a tired, dazed mind flashed the statement and played the words back, first clearly, then in gibberish, followed by foreign words. Helplessly, Esther beseeched the city noises she could hear, the cool unhuman walls, a slot of moonlight resting at the foot of her bed. *Somehow now please let me die*. However, the answering voice was Nurse Randall's. "Tomorrow, dear, we must get out of bed and begin moving about."

"That's a good dear."

Dear, a word Esther had always detested and refrained from ever using. Yet anything the nurse said or did, Esther admitted quite honestly, would have caused anger or annoyance. We are the same age, Esther marveled, how can she be so cruel and unfeeling? I, who have never knowingly hurt anyone, am alone with this woman.

"You'll soon be racing cars."

Esther forced a strange laugh. She surveyed her adversary. Nurse Randall possessed an ample, fleshy nose, and when she spoke at length, the wide nostrils spread grotesquely, all but obscuring light brown eyes and a thick red pout. Esther in a ribald moment had dubbed her the nose that breathes, talks, and listens.

"Really, Mrs. Schwartz, you're doing beautifully. Doctor will be so happy."

She reduces me to a baby as if I need candy rewards. Doctor will be so happy, as if he's my daddy. Her knees suddenly rebelled at movement, and despite herself she leaned against the nurse's arm.

"All right, dear, we'll go back into bed now."

Alone, Esther prayed that evening would not be; that her husband and tonight her son would not be present in the room, smiling, shuffling, anxious to be free of obligation and back into traffic and subways and familiar bedsprings.

She closed her eyes praying for death but awoke at the gentle tug of a new white starched hand, readying her for supper. Esther ate slowly to prolong the time when she would be greeted by guests. She felt herself swelling with anger, anger at things

she could not see or understand—the God she was obedient to since childhood, and He, too, had failed her. Fury was impossible, but her cancer, the speedy operation—everything speeded up past even remembering; everyone sure of everything. She would not go to Miami this winter; she would not witness Peter's graduation from college. These things assumed no importance; whatever slight significance they held in her life were ripped away. But now, please, do not let them take me home. Not this final humiliation. But this might well happen. She sensed the logic of these thoughts; her exile from everything would be denied.

When the supper tray was removed, her husband and son came forward, stiff and well dressed, ushers at a funeral. They smiled perfunctorily.

Esther knew it was wrong, because it was not their fault, and more important her true feeling would have to be unmasked. Since her stay at the hospital, she had felt naked, incapable of response; she felt the wild need to shock them—nurses, doctors, even herself. She began slowly mumbling, as the old men did, over a Torah reading on Saturday, saying familiar words, hardly pausing to mumble over them. Then with the start of recognition, she looked again and the phrases were different; this was not the same—today, tonight, all was different. She prepared to amaze her congregation.

"Why do you come?" she began slowly, "why do you look at me as if I'm a freak? Don't come again." Her voice was raised now. "Don't come—please let me die!"

Awful words fled from her mouth, terrible words, strange, obscene, then a pause. A screen put up around her bed—counting the slats—hands, nas-

ty hands, touching her all over—white clown hats of nurses, damn them—the stab of a needle.

The outburst served a satisfying purpose, since the smiles were more cautious and the pats were eliminating. Esther treated everyone with kindness and no sign of resentment, and after two more days she moved about her room easily, and with no dizziness, she reported to the surgeon. This time instead of leaving abruptly, the surgeon (she could never call him by name but only by title) began speaking in a dull monotone—the frustrated dronings of a walled-in flying insect.

"Mrs. Schwartz, it must be very frightening here for you. Of course it's strange, and there has been a great deal of pain. I've spoken to your husband, and he and I agree it's best to tell you the truth. The cells were of a malignant nature. I cut cleanly and successfully; as far as anyone in this world can say, there was nothing left. Malignancy itself can never be cut out. It was arrested, and with reasonable luck it will not spring up again."

It was done. He said the word she knew must be said—there was no mention of *benign*. Malignant, malignant, the cells remained undetected within her. Next time it might decide to live in her leg or stomach. She had known since her entrance to the hospital, in the terrible half-dead world of the recovery room, there would be a next time. Even if she recovered, there was only the deep hurt of being slapped again and again by someone you love.

2

A week passed. Esther was much stronger. How rapid her recovery was

proven when Randall suggested walking through halls alone to the lounge. "Magazines, a TV set; card games daily," the nurse tempted.

It was a successful idea. Esther was a card addict. At least once a week there was a game at someone's house, and almost daily in resorts; her husband once chided her, saying she would only get a tan when they put the sun lamp in the card room.

As she neared the lounge, Esther lowered her gaze. The plaid flannel robe billowed out everywhere. Satisfied that no one could detect her wound, she bit her lip softly and then opened her mouth, tasting the dry air.

After reading several articles in an old *Reader's Digest*, Esther began to feel assured. She was not a garrulous woman but neither was she shy; she intensely disliked, even feared, being surprised. At a party, if she knew only slightly any of the people who occupied the room, she was completely at ease. Or, amazingly, if she had never even been in the room before, she felt equal to the task of smiling, talking, and laughing. Esther recalled her first cruise eleven years ago; there was a cocktail party in the main lounge preceding the first meal at sea. Wearing a dress she suddenly did not like, she felt tears, and a childish tantrum seemed unavoidable. But when she and George did enter the cocktail lounge, her alert gray eyes raced to a slender woman in the corner, a friend from childhood not seen for a dozen years. And at the end of the cocktail hour, the captain was complimenting George upon his good fortune in finding such a charming and witty woman. Those were his exact words.

She was still alone. She waited patiently but no one pushed the door open to join her. She began to memo-

rize the soft, dull-colored leather chairs, an ebony-encased TV set, the half-filled magazine rack near the window. She sat there undismayed by her lonely vigil. After the afternoon nap, she would return.

Walking slowly, her eyes half-closed, she told herself the walls of the lounge were light gray, not the deep gray.

She napped until after four. She awoke refreshed, very thirsty for the juice set down beside her, and eager to return to the lounge. Again it was empty. Disappointed and not eager to peruse the magazines, she clicked on the TV set and awaited a program; any program would do. Persistent voices drove her back to the chair and berated her. In her body were living cells shoved into hiding by a surgeon's searching instruments, but at any moment they could take one deep breath and spill wildly on any section of her body they deemed desirable.

The set was beginning to flick on, but the picture had not appeared. She shook her head. One was always waiting in this lounge.

She found herself thinking of Peter—he should be hearing from law schools now. She must ask George about this. She thought she heard footsteps, but they continued past the room. The set was still not working. She adjusted the tuner, turned the knob to a magic number that contained a station, and young girls and boys dancing with each other came into sight.

Soon there would be supper. Peter had exams, so he would not come tonight, and she was relieved. She felt like a great grandmother who is only visited because of obligation and curiosity. Her attention fled to the

program and the healthy children rocking to the music as if in prayer, and she smiled at her bad joke, since children never prayed any more.

Esther shook herself from the lethargy of watching a bad program, turned it off, and said the word to herself that was usually confined to the darkness of her room when she was sure no one would enter. If she were not to be given help by a still robust body and a strong heart, as the doctors kept telling her how strong she was, then she must make it happen. She sang the word to herself, like the child scribbling forbidden words on a hidden blackboard. There was a clear feeling of delight and joy, and a bounce could have been detected in her steps as she made her way past attendants and nurses and wheelchairs to the four walls that would soon harbor a well-conceived plan.

The declaration of the word was enough for the moment. Just after supper, moments before visiting time, she formulated sentences and paragraphs to encircle the word, and she now began to formulate what she must do. Not even the presence of George's sinister-eyed sister could dampen her enthusiasm, for Esther knew that after this hour and a half there would be sufficient time to refine her scattered thoughts. She was animated in her conversation and saw the surprise in Blanche's expression—poor Blanche had expected tears. The time for tears had come and passed, and now was a time for cunning.

For the first time, Esther was not overwhelmed by people and their actions. She had seen the tightness of the general doctor's eyes as he focused upon the slight hard lump she had noticed some days before. The

specialist's office, narrow and long, like a foyer; the smug, insolent receptionists at every office she was forced to enter; careless and subtly rude nurses; this room, hostile white, devoid of resemblance to any other room she had ever been in—all these had defeated and overcome her, but now for the first time in days she was a stride ahead of them, ahead of all of them.

Once her visitors had left and Esther was free to plan, her new freshness had amazed her senses and caused a great and sudden weariness. Disdaining to stem the flow of deep-mouthed yawns, she promised to begin tomorrow in the lounge. Engulfed in a stream of yawns, she whispered, "First thing after breakfast."

3

Esther prayed that no one would be there. At best only one week was left at the hospital. It could not happen here; there was constant supervision. At least once a day the door to her room was opened by some nurse or doctor who was until that moment a complete stranger to her. How she now longed for her apartment, her eighth-floor apartment, and it would be simple and uninvolved with little chance of someone stopping her. She had read somewhere that a person leaping from a high place invariably suffers a fatal heart attack before hitting the concrete. But it did not matter, part of her was dead already; the fall would only claim the rest. Esther wiped away ever so slight tears. What a fool she was. Tears were over; self-pity served no satisfactory purpose.

She pushed open the door and found herself looking at a slight, gray-haired man apparently looking

for something he had dropped on the floor. He looked at her beseechingly.

"Pardon, Madam, do my socks match?" With that, he burlesquely lifted his trouser legs above his ankles, exposing the full-length socks and slender, hairless legs.

She smiled. "They seem to match."

"Aah," he sighed, "but there are so many shades of blue, I'm still not certain."

She smiled again. "If not, they're very close; no one will know."

The man shook a graceful oval head amicably. Esther noticed he had a short, meticulously groomed beard. "Yet Rev Akiba is quoted as saying that the difference between the good man and the evildoer is so slight as to relegate one to the kingdom of heaven and the other—" In an eloquent gesture, a stubby finger was directed downwards.

"You're Jewish?" Esther asked happily.

"What else?" The man sat down.

Esther blurted out, "It's been more than a month since I've been in my *shul*."

"Tsk, you've been here that long?"

"No, but I was feeling sick before I came."

"A *shul* may be built in one's head if he desires it so; it takes only an intense wish to make yourself the *minun*. I have sung the *shacchris* and the *mariv*, led the *musaf* service, read the Torah, made the speech and the appeal for funds."

Esther laughed happily.

"Good. I make you laugh. It would be wise, then, to be friends."

"My name is Esther Schwartz."

"And—" he stood up and brought himself to continental attention—"I am Solomon Ginzburg."

They shook hands formally. The man looked at his watch. "Would you

care to look at some TV?"

"Thank you, yes."

He turned on the set, and they became involved in a movie about an unhappy rich man. Solomon spoke only once more and that was during the third commercial.

"Mrs. Schwartz—"

"Esther."

"Thank you. Esther, the rich man is a fool. We don't need a terrible movie to explain this to us." He began to chant. "But if the rich man is a fool, what then is the poor man who is unhappy and has no cash or credit?"

Esther did not quite understand, but apparently Solomon was only asking the question and not answering it.

They watched as the commercial was replaced by the rich man's wife deciding to attempt to make the man over, though he was past sixty.

In the beginning Esther was fidgety. Solomon was the first man she spoke with since—he, of course, must know she was a patient and possibly very ill, but he appeared so friendly and relaxed, so humorous and intelligent. My, she had all but flirted—demurely lowered her eyes at him—at her age and she murmured, "at *his* age." She tried to guess how old he was. He was old, no question of that. Solomon's face was gray, not with illness but due to the pounding of time. He walked with a limp, or was it tired legs; she liked him very much, his beard, the fact that he was Jewish, and, most important, because he was not a prier. He did not say, "So what are you in here for?" He was not even cleverly curious. Poor Solomon only wished to know if his socks were mismates. Poor man, he must have lost his wife and, now alone, days must be met. How terrible

to grow old and outlive your loved ones.

The first day home, the first chance to be alone and near an open window before anything could happen. What could happen to make a change, and why fear it? Many years ago when her mother's brother, Meyer, jumped off his roof—how hard it had been to get an undertaker and the *shul*. Meyer's own *shul*, of which he had been a member for years, refused to send the rabbi.

There would not be that trouble now; everyone was more adult. Too, so many more are doing it—two from our own synagogue last year. Rabbi Cohen will come for me.

No more than two weeks ago she was ready to put the roast up. The maid hadn't left yet, and Esther, feeling sweaty for no good reason, had asked the girl to tend to the roast while she took a bath. She saw the growth immediately and clutched her breasts as if caught alone in the bathroom by a stranger. She dried herself hurriedly, slipped into clothes, and automatically began to check the thermometer plunged halfway into the meat.

The following day Doctor Zimmerman licked his lips and said she should get into a taxi and go to an address he scribbled down. Frightened, but determined not to cry, she gave the cabdriver the street number in the East 70's. Day-dreaming, forcing herself to ignore what was happening, she pretended she was a young, pregnant secretary about to be aborted of her boss's baby. But all fantasy and any relief was dispelled by *this* doctor's touch, the positive nod of his bullet head, the call to the hospital reserving a room. No time even to go home and get a

suitcase. She was a helpless thing, tossed from hand to hand and finally left in a clean-sheeted bed, alone and completely defenseless.

A knock on the door sped her thoughts away, and she smiled with surprise. It was Solomon.

"No, dear Esther, no need to fuss. I can stay only minutes." He glided softly to the window, a frail shadow lined against the dim blue light of a still afternoon. She sat on the bed primly. Her eyes twitched as she tried to shift her thoughts back to the conversational demands of her visitor.

Solomon raised his hands plaintively. "No one comes to the lounge anymore. Every room is full; so sad, like the hotel no one wishes to spend time in. Yet the lounge is never occupied."

Esther said, "Nobody wants anything to do with a hospital. Get better and go home; TV we all have at home."

Solomon beamed like a slit of sunshine. "Yes, but the sages have told us that to live under stress should not frighten or embarrass man but enable him to persevere and truly know love."

Esther scoffed, barely holding back choking sobs. "I know what I had. I didn't have to come here and be operated on to learn how to enjoy my family." Then she did cry.

Solomon rested his head against the window. He didn't offer to stop her crying. He waited quietly, then spoke softly, staring at his hands. "If I said anything to offend—"

She shook her head.

"Wisdom is not enough, is never enough. To merely apply it like a salve on an open wound is false. One must balance everything; but if there is never really a proper balance, well, what then is there, Esther?"

"Death," she replied, shocked by her continuing brazenness.

He nodded. "Death, yes, like a murderer waiting on a street corner we never pass. However, one day, for no logical reason, we take the long way home and this street must be crossed, and the lurker's patience is rewarded."

Esther bit her lip. "Shall I ask the nurse for tea?"

"Yes."

"Lemon?" she asked.

"Two slices, please," he answered.

He pursed his lips reflectively. "The old require stimulation. Liquor is excellent, but I do not indulge. Sucking a lemon, hiding the sugar under my tongue, and sipping tea is my vice. Do you mind watching a sinner sinning?"

Esther laughed. "Of course not." She was silent for a minute. "Do you have a wife?" she asked.

"Once."

"Oh."

"We were divorced many years ago."

Divorced. If he had said he was married to three women, she could not have been more startled.

"We tired of breakfast and dinner together. Even the occasional demand upon the other's person was more than an annoyance—an invasion of privacy. So Miriam claimed her freedom and with the divorce allowed me mine."

Esther gazed at him. A divorced man, not a widower. She looked again.

"I am very old, much older than you imagine," he answered her silent query.

She saw the hesitant sun, finally swallowed up by the fierce gloom of

clouds. Solomon stood motionless, perhaps tired by the talk.

She invited him to the lounge.

4

"Solomon, can you explain simply what love is?"

"If you wish to know what love is simply, then you understand how complex an emotion it is for all of us."

"I love my family, yet I do not wish to be with them any longer. I still worry about them and love them, but now I don't care for them, too. Does it make sense?"

Solomon's eyes blinked furiously as if they typed out the message his mouth spoke. "Certainly you love them, but now in your affliction you love the self even more."

Fool—she had talked too much. Solomon either knew or could guess what fate she had planned.

Solomon smiled. "Good, you're ready. I've someone you must meet and help comfort. She is waiting for us in the lounge."

"Me, help to comfort?"

"Your eyes are less angry today. You are happier?"

"Yes, happier than yesterday."

He took her arm. "Poor child, the doctors could do nothing for her. They began the operation, then stopped it. The dam of her body had given away. The disease was everywhere; no place to begin or end."

"How long?"

"A month, perhaps."

She took his arm. "What can we say to her?"

But he was hurrying her down the hall. "Just to be there is enough." Then they were in the lounge.

"Before you leave us, Esther, a present. I can see into the future. I will tell you how successful your son will be in the Law and how many grandchildren you will have. Three children, a robust bank account in two banks, the home in New Rochelle."

She laughed the way he always made her laugh, like a schoolgirl, the loud, deep, boisterous laugh, devoid of affectation. "Can you really see into the future?"

He replied seriously, "Yes."

"Will I live to see my grandchildren? That answer can be your present, Solomon."

He asked, "You've changed your mind?"

She ignored his parry.

He nodded. "Very well, tomorrow I will tell you. I can use the future only once a day. More exhausts me and blurs my vision."

"Solomon, how pale you are, sit down."

"There is another in the lounge."

"Oh."

"A man this time."

"If the girl is there, we can play bridge."

"Esther, Esther," he chanted, "yesterday you were an angel with that girl. Today you will be even more understanding."

She laughed. "Your assistant."

"Never my assistant. My associate, my *chaver*, my dearest friend."

"Solomon, there is something else?"

"Bad news," he said gently.

She bowed her head in surrender.

"I looked into the dull glass and saw not your fate revealed but my own," he said.

She tried to touch him.

"It is a shock to finally see death, look at it, and then emerge for the time being still alive. Esther, you asked once what was love. I could not answer, but death—would you wish to know of that?"

"I don't know."

"Death is what your imagination wills it to be. I have always despised the bitter cold, perhaps because I have never dressed warm enough to ward off the chill. I saw myself in a summer suit and wearing no shoes, huddled under a leafless tree as a snowstorm began."

"Oh, Solomon."

"I didn't feel the cold or the snow, but the branches were twisted arms, choking life out of me, but I beat them off and escaped. I willed it away because I knew you would be waiting."

"Solomon—"

"It was important to be here this afternoon. The girl who must be without hope and this man, a diabetic, just losing a leg, still uncomfortable in his wheelchair. If we can entice them to play a game of bridge, who

knows? They may yet enjoy a night of—"

She was shocked.

"Ah, Esther," he assured her, "only an image, for all things are a bridge possible between people—the sick, the maimed, the dying, the healthy, the untouched people; and our words and compassion remain the only links between one life and another."

He took her arm roughly. "You had a cancer, I am dying. We enjoy each other each time we meet. That is life. Death is submission. When you wish to submit, have no fear, you will die. You gave me strength. Oh, Esther, when you are home doing the wash, planning supper, cutting a melon or grapefruit, remember this hospital, what happened here, and how you helped."

"But, Solomon—"

"May I lean on you?" he said. He had no weight. He seemed to be wasting away as they walked. Then he was ahead of her, and she, suddenly afraid, asked him, "But what if they won't listen, if they wish no help?"

He stopped and waited for her, a skeleton of a man with burning eyes. "Come, Esther, let us try. Let us see."

Acceptance

● Sister Mary Honora, O.S.F.

They hold enough delight of autumn drought
and winter freeze, to glow long after the light is out—
these logs from seasoned trees.

After the april skylarking and summer tan,
the weathered worth of every plank supine
now planed to a desired depth and line
exactly fits across the hearthstone rung.
There sparked by a vivacious tongue,
they give the textured grain and sudden glint
verse editors retain for predetermined print.

In Hope of a Lucid Epiphany

• John C. Hoy

Let the unmanteling of the house
 be a silent mass
 sign for fir and spruce
To hold their needles poised
 and wholly tentative
 aware their boughs
Will ignite and draw breath.

Knowing their flames will rise
 in a pandemonium of many voices
 merely to cease
As the charred pinnacles and sticks,
 the naked hosts,
 of still another Christmas,
Another silencing of cymbals.

The dearth of annual riches hurts
 if we stop to count.
 But the days lengthen.
While in the clearness of these nights
 Hesperus' star is brighter
 and our burning of the trees
Tempt the quickening creatures of the earth.

Try to forget this awkward Epiphany,
 forgotten feast
 of a forgotten rite,
And all uneasy thoughts it might proclaim:
 the Magi who came
 the restless beasts
Frankincense flattering the January night.

Give up the Christening of Christ
 cease to acquiesce
 to this orphaned holiday
Ancient feast of twelve nights,
 for as children
 of another age
Our homilies are brief.

We scarcely mark the solstice
let alone
the date.

Commemoration is brother
to caprice.

We'd rather celebrate,
Uncalendared, this destiny we call our own.

Epiphanies

● John Fandel

What delicacy, what force
Reins Art, the Winged Horse
Which throws without remorse
The rider, to run its course?

I learned in solitude and silence this:
Do not construe the world amiss.
This lesson is the first degree of bliss
And all of Knowledge about Nemesis.

Indifference, detachment, these are two
Of several meaning one gives credence to,
And not for nothing, since there are so few
Who think so well, but do but to undo.

Serenity, serenity, a bell
Tolling the death of conflict. Who can spell
Its meaning by its practice just as well
As literally, is rare as the word's knell.

A figure for a love, sound and ideal,
Is a conceit too difficult and real
For trochees or iambics to reveal
In scanning less than Jesus, the Christ. *Hallel.*

Nature goes on, sea as season, on
And on, while great great great grandsires, gone,
Feed roses they once grafted to make dawn
Longer than you can ever look upon.

Grief again grief again grief.
Leaf after leaf after leaf.
Be brief again, grief, be brief.
Belief after grief. Belief.

The Accident

● Michael Field

The kid was in a great brown leather jacket. There were leaves and dirt in his hair and in the leather of his jacket, but his boots were clean. He just lay there on the stretcher and Aaron Stern didn't know where to begin. He was glad for the excursion of the kid's chest, for his eyes were closed. He reached under the kid's jacket and felt for the thump of his heart. The kid opened his eyes. "I didn't hear you, doc," the kid said.

"No, you didn't," Aaron said.

"Am I badly hurt?"

"You don't look it."

"But you can't tell by looks, can you, doc?"

Aaron was surprised to hear him say it. There wasn't wrinkle or frown in the kid's face. It was all bright and shiny as if nothing had ever come through to the kid but the bright smooth surface.

"No, you can't tell by looks," Aaron said mostly to himself.

"You sound tired, doc."

"I am," Aaron said. "I am very tired."

"Sorry to get you up," the kid said.

"Don't be sorry," Aaron said. "My duty."

He wished the kid wouldn't say anything. The kid had gone through a fence and down a gulley, and he could be dead before Aaron had even looked for what it was that had killed him. And worse of all, Aaron still felt full of the quiet of his bed, and Mrs. Metcalfe's wakening him seemed as

unreal as when it had happened just an hour's sleep from two a.m. But the kid was here, and if the wild kid could just let him work, he'd find a way through.

"Nothing hurts?" Aaron asked.

"Nothing."

"You look pretty beat up for nothing."

"I'm pretty tough, doc."

"Let me see. Let *me* see," Aaron said.

The kid began taking off his own jacket. Aaron knew he should stop him. The jacket would have to come off so that he could put his hands and his stethoscope on the kid's chest, but the kid shouldn't be doing it. He should be lying still. And there could be something broken in his thoracic spine or in his humerus. But he went through with it without any pain.

"Suppose you'd of hurt yourself?" Aaron said. "Suppose you'd of hurt yourself sitting up like that and taking off your own jacket?"

The kid didn't argue. He just said, "I'm sorry, doc."

But the smooth muscles of the kid's face were still smooth. There wasn't any change in his eyes; they were still happy. He didn't look very sorry. He placed his jacket on the floor beside the wheels of the stretcher. Aaron picked up the jacket.

"Nice jacket," Aaron said to him. The leather was warm and tough and he knew it would take a lot of beating.

"Yeh," the kid said. "It's English."

"It was a nice jacket," Aaron said.

"Don't worry about it, doc."

"Let me see your chest," Aaron said. He put the jacket on the aluminum chair.

He went over the kid's chest. He examined his abdomen and extremities. He thought he was going to have a tough time of it because the kid would clown or would act like he didn't know what he should be doing, because he didn't really see why he had to have the doctor have him take down his trousers and remove his boots and have the doctor examine all of him. But the kid didn't act like that at all. Even when Aaron had to fight with the kid's large silver buckle and yank off his tight hill-billy boots, the kid just lay still like Aaron had told him to do.

It was only on the belly that Aaron had any trouble. The kid kept his muscles tight, and Aaron thought there might be a torn spleen or gut inside. But he talked to the kid, and the kid became less tense and made his belly muscles loose.

When it was over, there wasn't anything but the large laceration through the left upper arm. That would be an hour, but there wasn't anything hard or dangerous about it. Aaron would just have to get it clean and the layers sewed back together. After that he'd be back in bed.

"You're a good patient."

"Nothing to it," the kid said. "Easy as rolling off a log."

But it wasn't that easy; Aaron knew that. Patients came and went in the emergency room. Lacerations from fights. Drunks. Kids. It seemed like a whole circus of cuts, bruises, aches, nausea. It was hard to get them on your side, and have them move and talk and lie the way you told them to. It was that the hospital

and the interne were as strange to the patient as the green tile of the emergency room still was to Aaron.

"What's your name?" he asked the kid.

"Eric. Eric Lyons. What's your name, doc?"

"Doctor Aaron Stern." It was hard to say the doctor and he hurried over it.

"You're a good doc."

Aaron felt a grin coming on, although it was hard doing it with an unshaven face and the grime setting in between the stubble of his beard.

"I don't get much sleep in the emergency room," he said to the kid.

"How come?"

"Because of reckless guys like you," Aaron heard himself say to himself inside of himself. He was glad it wasn't being said to the kid. It wasn't Aaron's place to judge or get angry.

"Better get you sewn up."

The kid looked over at his laceration. "I'm your turkey, doc."

Now there was the problem of setting up. Of getting all the suture material on the tray. He could call Mrs. Metcalfe, but she was in the office with the state troopers. He didn't want to bother her. He could do it himself. He would feel better if he did it all himself.

He walked over to the chromium-plated cabinet on the wall. He reached into the sterile jars with the long sterile forceps. He dropped a tube of suture material onto the floor and it broke. The kid didn't say anything about it. Aaron walked back to the stretcher.

"Drop your teeth, doc?" The kid laughed.

"You're going to have to get that T-shirt off," Aaron said.

"Okay, doc." He started taking it

off on his own. Aaron stopped him and did it. It was part of Aaron's job. He looked over the kid's naked chest and wondered if the T-shirt had hidden a major injury. It hadn't. The chest was as smooth and bright as the kid's face. There wasn't any hair anywhere either, except for a few blond strands over the sternum.

"Pretty young," Aaron said.

"Seventeen," the kid said. "But I look younger. Everybody thinks I'm younger. When I was sixteen, my mother could pass me off for eleven. How do you like that, doc?"

Aaron flicked the switch. The beam of the mobile spotlight was in the wound.

Aaron felt frozen. He was going to scrub his hands. Everything had to be right now. Afterward, he wouldn't be able to touch anything without contaminating himself. That would mean scrubbing all over again and using another pair of gloves. He couldn't stand wasting the time and having the nurses know he used more than one pair of gloves per case.

"How old are you, doc?" the kid asked.

Aaron was too much in the case to answer the kid's question. He would when things had settled. Now he had to keep his mind open like in a test so that the ideas would all come to him and he wouldn't forget anything. That was really his first duty. Talking to the kid could come afterward.

Aaron went over to the sink. He let the white phisobex run over his hands and disinfect them. He washed them clean with water. He dried them with one of the sterile towels. He reached into his seven-and-a-half gloves. It was hard just touching the inside while he stretched them on. He still had to be with it hard, so that he wouldn't touch the outside and

contaminate them. Nobody was watching and he had seen men cheat with a single touch. Once Aaron had tried it, but he had kept thinking about it during the case, and he had had to take off his gloves.

The gloves were on, and Aaron felt something different now. He was standing in his white uniform. His hands were clean and shining. He had sterile gloves on. There was nothing he could touch with his hands except his sterile instruments and the sterilized portion of the patient. It really separated him from everything else in the room.

He walked back to the kid. "I look older than I am," he said to the kid. "I've always looked older than I really was."

The kid didn't answer him.

"When I was twelve, I was as tall as I am now. And as smart," Aaron added. He had to laugh a little. He remembered how when he was twelve he was already selling clothes to grown men in his father's little clothing store.

He took a sponge and soaked it with Zephiran. He began washing the skin around the laceration, being sure not to enter the wound itself.

"I have a kid brother your age," Aaron said. Richard was a lot taller and slimmer than this boy, but he had the same unconcern.

"You do, doc? Does he have a cycle?"

Aaron had to laugh a little. "Not in our family. Fact is I would stop him myself."

But Aaron broke away from himself and went back to the patient.

"What were you doing when you were twelve?" Aaron asked. He took more aqueous Zephiran and did the second washing.

"Raising hell and fixing motors."

The kid laughed. "When I was twelve, I was the only guy in the state Bill Montpilier would trust with his Jag. How do you like that, doc? Ouch," the kid said.

"Sorry," Aaron said. As carefully as he had been, he still had gotten a little of the Zephiran in the wound. He knew he shouldn't do it because it hurt the patient, and they had showed him in medical school how it killed the leukocytes and the antibodies—all the natural defenses of the body, and would allow infection to set in. In his mind's eye he could see the purple stained amoeba-shaped nuclei of the leukocytes just as he had seen them under the microscope in medical school. Aaron wondered how much longer it would take before he got the knack of washing the skin without letting any of the Zephiran get in the wound.

"It won't happen again," Aaron said.

"Forget it. I had a broken arm when I was twelve. It didn't even hurt me. How do you like that, doc? I cried when I broke it, but that wasn't because it hurt me. That was the funniest thing, doc. As much as it hurt, I wouldn't cry. I've learned to be tough."

Aaron had to smile to himself. Toughness was the one thing that didn't go with this kid. It was as if he were carefree and fine as silk. Delicate and happy. But Aaron wondered if that wasn't what toughness meant—to be able to be carefree.

He almost contaminated his left glove when he put the second towel down. He would have to be with it more. He still hadn't learned how to set up a sterile field without thinking about each step. And it really was so minor. He didn't mind when he was in medical school and learning, but

he felt he should be able to do the small things with his hands without thinking.

And the light was beginning to hurt his eyes. It would do this. When they first woke you out of the sleep, the light would seem bright and then you would ignore it, and then after a while it would get bright again and begin to sting your eyes. Any little bit of light would sting your eyes. Off the tile, the drapes, the chrome suture tray. But you could forget about it, and the sting would go away.

"Now you'll have to lie still," he said to the kid. He was thinking of where he should start infiltrating the wound with novocain from his syringe and needle. He was in the muscle when he remembered he hadn't warned the kid about the little pinprick he would feel at first.

"Feel a little prick?" he asked the kid.

The kid nodded no, then let out a squeaky no, but that was all. He was far away.

The wound was swollen with novocain. It was beefy red where the muscle showed through. Aaron picked all the twigs and leaves out with the smooth forceps; he didn't know if they were the right kind. But there wasn't anybody near to ask. It was really such a small thing, but it would have been nice to know exactly what kind would be most efficient. The smooth ones were working and so he stuck with them.

The kid was quiet. The wound was tricky, but Aaron had gotten it clean. He began sewing the fascia over, and this tucked the muscle behind it. He liked doing this, watching the muscle get hidden and go to its normal place while the thin layer of fascia-like lining was sewn together. But it would soon get monotonous. You just had to

put in enough stitches to close the fascial layer. But you still had to be careful. The kid was quiet and Aaron kept to his wound. He half wished the kid would say something. But Aaron felt good now. He wasn't getting personal with the kid anymore, and he was doing his job as a doctor. He was a little sorry he had gotten as personal with him as he had. A little sorry he had talked about the leather jacket and his own kid brother and their ages. He tried to forget it and stay with the sewing.

He looked up. The kid was talking to the troopers.

The state troopers were at the foot of the stretcher beside the green oxygen tanks. The troopers were big shouldered and over six feet. Their hair was kept. They wore shiny black boots. Their blue uniforms had a gold stripe down the side of the breeches. Aaron felt thin and undressed in his cotton scrub suit; they felt like pajamas. He wanted to shave and wash the oil from his face.

"Okay to talk to him?" the taller trooper asked.

"Sure," Aaron said. He wasn't really sure, but he couldn't see where it could harm the kid.

The shorter trooper pulled out the long form and began going through the routine questions about the accident. Aaron went back to his sewing. The troopers were done, and they started to go.

"Do you have to take my license?" Eric asked.

"You know we do," the shorter trooper said.

"But, Bob," Eric said, "I won't get it back."

"Don't always be so sure," the taller trooper said.

"Dirty trick," Eric said. "Dirty

trick. I wasn't doing more than twenty-five."

"It's all written down," the taller trooper said.

"But he almost took it away from me with the Model A," Eric said.

"Can we help you any, doctor?" the shorter trooper asked.

Aaron looked up from his sewing. They were standing now straight and true and putting their pencils back in their clean shirt pockets. The flap went up, then creased, and buttoned down again.

"Was he unconscious?" Aaron asked.

"No," the taller trooper said.

"How'd he go off the road then?" Aaron asked.

"We know as much as you do," the shorter trooper said.

Aaron couldn't understand. It was their job, and they should know. If he were the troopers, he would have had to know.

"Anybody coming in?" Eric asked the troopers.

"Might be," the taller trooper said.

"Just what I thought," the kid said.

The kid waved goodbye to the troopers and they waved goodbye to him. Aaron went back to his sewing. He tried to hold the needle driver the way he'd seen the troopers stand. Firm and direct, but it wouldn't go. It still felt heavy in his hand, and he had to think every step of the way for it.

"You really weren't going over twenty-five?" Aaron asked.

"Doc, what would I be doing racing when all I want is to ride around these here little green hilly places before I go to Cal."

"You going to California?"

"Yep."

"Leaving Bragsport?"

"No sense in my staying, with me

all finished up at high school, is there?"

"By yourself?" Aaron asked. The kid was young; he would get lost.

Eric didn't answer him. Aaron went back to the accident. He had to know whether some disease had caused the kid to crack up. Something had to happen for him to crack up at twenty-five miles an hour.

"You weren't unconscious before, after, or during the accident?" Aaron asked.

"That's not the same as a little dreamy?" the kid asked.

"You fell asleep," Aaron said. The psychomotor equivalent of epilepsy was a rare bird, but this could be it. Aaron felt sharp. It might be a case, and only after three weeks of intern-
ing.

"Doc, what would I be doing sleeping on a cycle?"

"No funny feeling in your head? A dizziness?"

"No. You been in books too long, doc. I was out riding on the tar roads past Ogletown Center, going up and down and around, and the moonlight soft all around like it isn't ever going to get day and bright and hurt your eyes. You haven't ever done it. I can see that, doc. So you don't know about the dreamy feeling."

But Aaron knew the feeling. Except it wasn't in the middle of the night on some crazy motorcycle. It was in the Brandenburg concerto or in canoeing up the Schuylkill River with Fairmount Park all around you. He felt swindled. This wasn't the psychomotor equivalent of epilepsy at all.

"You look for dreams at the wrong time, at the wrong place, and with the wrong things," he said to the kid.

"That's where you're wrong, doc. I wasn't looking for anything. I just

felt the soft feeling all around me, and then it just happened that the cycle was going straight and I knew I wasn't on tar anymore. We went through all that white wood and I slipped off the back of the cycle and went down the gulley to the creek, and all the time I was tumbling I was dreaming hard of when I was eleven and I had come home from school with Arnie Johnson and I had gone tumbling down that same gulley and broken my arm, and my mother had to leave her lawn party and come get me and carry me back home. I saw it all again, all over again. It was the same gulley and the same wreck."

"The same place?" Aaron asked. The kid had crashed a cycle where he'd broken his arm at eleven years old. Accident prone. Freudian coincidence. It was too dramatic. Unreal. At three o'clock in the morning here he was an interne suturing, and the kid was talking out of a movie or a psychiatric textbook. Except these weren't real things like lacerations and fractures. They were in the movies or in the case histories.

"The same place," the kid said. "And I can still remember being carried by my mother through all those dressed-up party people and me scratched up and with my trousers all dirty."

Aaron hadn't been able to see a little of the kid tumbling down the gulley. That was hard with the kid lying here with only a laceration to show for it. But the lawn party he could see. He remembered when he was a boy and living in Bragsport. His aunt and uncle would take him for rides out around the Montpilier estates, which surrounded Bragsport. He could remember one June afternoon way up on the lawn, which ran up for half a mile, sitting up there, chairs and

tables with sun umbrellas and men and women. It had been like the lawn parties he had remembered from the movies with the lords and ladies on castle grounds in England. He could see this boy with overalls going through it. It was like somebody making the movie real.

"You must have made quite a scene," Aaron said. He knew it wasn't much to say.

"I got to see my mother," the boy said.

It hurt Aaron a little but it didn't hurt the kid. Aaron's mother was a little old woman from a Polish village, and she wouldn't know even what a lawn party meant, and she sewed and scrubbed the floors in his father's store. But Aaron never had to break his arm to get back to her.

"Very Freudian," is all he could say to the kid. He hoped the kid would pick it up and that somehow it would help him over the deep unknown hurt he must have.

"I don't know what you mean," the kid said.

Aaron looked over at him. He was just out of high school. Aaron remembered how in high school any talk like Freud branded you a bookworm or an icky. You never admitted to anybody at Bragsport High School that you read books. The most important thing was to act like a nice guy in the halls and get elected to some office. This kid couldn't begin to understand Freud.

"You wouldn't be interested in Freud," Aaron said.

"How do you know?"

"He was a psychiatrist," Aaron began.

"A crazy doctor." The kid laughed, then stopped. "Doc, you ain't saying I'm loco?"

"No, you see what is meant by

Freudian—" Aaron stopped himself. The kid was really from another world. Wealthy, gentile, sure, aloof. And nobody had given Aaron the right to trespass. But it really wouldn't be trespassing. It would be more like preaching.

"You're not finishing it, doc."

"Nope." Then as a concession to the kid, "It's not important."

"Just as long as you don't think I'm loco. I might be a little wild, but I ain't loco. Ever hear of Jimmy Dean, doc?"

"Yep." He was trying to keep his mind mostly to the sewing, but he couldn't but help picture Jimmy Dean. The kid didn't know it, but that's what he was, a short Jimmy Dean.

"That's all I am—a little wild. That's what my mother calls me. Her wild tiger. But she don't mean nothing by it. She gives me everything I want. Where do you think I got the dough for the cycle?" There was a pause.

"It's my stepfather, doc. He's a stingy miser. If I were his real son, he says he'd whip me many times. How do you like that? But I feel sorry for the guy, doc. As much as my mother and me can enjoy ourselves, that guy just can't. He's the sourest guy you'd want to see at a party."

"Maybe that's what you need," Aaron said, "a father like that." And this father seemed to be somebody Aaron knew from his own world.

"Why, doc, my real father's good enough for me. He ain't ever made no million bucks. But he ain't no sour puss. He's a regular guy, and he's always got a smile. He trains horses. My mother says he's never been good for anything. But she can't help it, doc. He ran off before I was even

born. How do you like that? But he comes around. He sees me on every damn one of my birthdays. On the last one he gave me the ten one-thousand dollar bills I carry around in my boots."

"Down there?" Aaron asked. He looked over at the boots. There was a leather purse hanging from the side. There probably were ten one-thousand dollar bills in there, but he didn't say that to the kid. He noticed the boots weren't even full size. They were short and like a child's boots.

Aaron looked back to the kid. The kid could go anywhere, but where? Then Aaron couldn't think or say anything. And then all he could feel was his own hurt about the lost kid. But he couldn't get the hurt over to the kid. Aaron just said, "You'd better stay in Bragsport."

"I can't. I have to go to Cal."

"Why?"

The kid grinned. "I can't go all over that, doc."

"You won't tell me?"

"Doc, I have my tickets, and I'm going to leave tomorrow morning."

And Aaron knew he could go. He had the ten thousand dollars, and what was to keep him? All the hurt was really in Aaron.

"You want to leave Bragsport," he said to the kid, "and I've just come back."

"That's funny, doc," the kid said.

The skin was closing fast and Aaron had to decide what to do. He just couldn't let the kid go on to California. Not right now. The kid would have to see a doctor in the morning and the day afterward. He didn't think the kid was very responsible; he didn't seem able to comprehend the seriousness of anything.

"You'll have to stay here overnight," he said to the kid.

"In the hospital?"

"Or with your parents. They would have to be responsible for you."

"I haven't been home for a year, doc—since the last fight with my stepfather. I live on Bill Montpilier's estate. I have two rooms on the second floor of his garage. How do you like that? Bill's my buddy. Him and my mom are cousins. My mom's a Montpilier."

"That won't do," Aaron said. "Home or the hospital."

"Too many fights at home."

"Then it's the hospital."

"Not if I don't want to."

"You could sign your release of responsibility. You can sign that you left the hospital against advice. You can sign and go," Aaron said. He had done so much, and the kid was fighting him. But he wasn't fair to the kid. Aaron was the doctor, and he should listen and he should talk to his patient.

"It'll only be for overnight, Eric."

The kid didn't say anything.

"I haven't led you wrong, have I, Eric? Haven't I been your buddy?"

"You have, doc. You been a regular Joe."

The skin was closing nicely. Aaron looked up. It was Mrs. Metcalfe. He didn't know how she or the other nurses did it, but it was uncanny. They could always time you to come in at the end or near the end of the case.

"Anything I can do, doctor?" she asked.

"Perhaps at the beginning of the case," he said.

She ignored it. "Okay for the parents to come in?"

"Sure," he said.

Aaron wished that he were clean-shaven. He wondered what they would think of him with his heavy

beard and sweating. He tried to picture them, but he couldn't. He could picture the kid's real father, though. He could see the swaggering horse trainer, who must look just like this boy but a little older.

He had put the last stitch in, and he stopped to look at the wound. It ran from the shoulder almost to the elbow, but it was all closed now with a neat row of blue-green nylon sutures. It actually looked very pretty.

He soaked one of the cotton two-by-two's with saline and began wiping the crusted blood away from the wound edges. It was then he knew there was somebody else in the room. There was no noise, but he felt as if the room had become more crowded. When he looked, there was the woman against the tile wall and the father just three feet away from him.

"You're the interne," the mother said from the wall.

"Yes, I am," Aaron said.

"You've done a fine job," the stepfather said. He was looking at the wound.

"How would you know?" the mother said from the wall.

"You've done a fine job," the man repeated to Aaron.

"Thank you, sir," Aaron said.

The father had a round, kind face. He stood with a slight slouch. There were lines in his face. It wasn't smooth like Eric's or the mother's.

"Eric, baby, why do you get us in these fixes?" the mother asked. Her words were slurred, and she gazed

around the room. She had not looked at Eric.

"Hello, Mom," Eric said.

"Will you be much longer?" the stepfather asked.

"I only have to put the bandage on," Aaron said.

"We can stay for that." The man walked over to the woman. She had thin cheekbones and jet black hair. There was still a shine to her face. She had the dead cool beauty of bright eyes and fine skin. Aaron had to see her and remember her as she must have been as a beautiful, young woman. She still was tall and thin and stood gracefully and simply, leaning against the green-tiled wall.

Eric attempted to lift himself, but Aaron touched his chest and asked him to lie down.

"He's going to have to be admitted," Aaron said.

The man came back from the wall. The woman remained.

"Thank you, doctor," the man said. "I've already spoken to our surgeon and the arrangements have been made."

Aaron thought that the stepfather would offer him some money, and he was glad that he didn't. It would have been hard refusing the man's generosity. But Eric did, and Aaron told him to save it for college, and then he caught himself and told the kid to save it for whatever he wanted to be. He said goodbye to the stepfather and Eric; the mother looked away. Aaron walked out into the hallway; at least, the kid was staying overnight.



Contributors

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